

# North Carolina Minority Health Facts



# American Indians

State Center for Health Statistics and Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities

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## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present basic health facts about American Indians in North Carolina in the areas of: mortality, chronic diseases, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, health risk factors, access to health care, quality of life, maternal and infant health, and child and adolescent health. But first we give some background information on the American Indian population in the state.

North Carolina has one of the largest American Indian populations east of the Mississippi River and among the top ten largest American Indian population in the nation, according to the 2000 Census. The 2000 Census counted 99,600 residents of North Carolina who reported their race as American Indian alone, and also more than 20,000 who reported American Indian in combination with another race. The American Indian population of North Carolina has increased by more than 20 percent since 1990 and currently represents a little more than one percent of the total population of the state.

American Indians in North Carolina are younger than the majority white population. According to the 2000 Census, the median age of the state's American Indian population was 29.8 years, compared to 37.6 years for the white population of North Carolina.

Although American Indians live in each of North Carolina's 100 counties (see 2003 data in the map on page 2), nearly three-fourths of the population lives in 11 counties, five of which are clustered in the southeastern part of the state. Forty-seven percent of North Carolina's American Indian population lives in Robeson County (mostly Lumbee), accounting for 38 percent of that county's total population. Seven percent of North Carolina's American Indians live in Jackson and Swain counties (mostly Cherokee), accounting for 16 percent of the total population in these counties.

Among the American Indian tribes in North Carolina are eight state-recognized tribes: the Eastern Band of Cherokee (who live primarily in Swain, Jackson, and Graham counties), Coharie (Harnett, Sampson), Haliwa-Saponi (Halifax, Warren, Nash), Lumbee (Robeson, Scotland, Hoke), Meherrin (Hertford, Bertie, Gates, Northampton), Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation (Orange, Alamance), Sappony (Person), and Waccamaw-Siouan (Columbus, Bladen). The Eastern Band of Cherokee is a federally-recognized tribe, the only tribe residing on a federal reservation, and the only group served by the Indian Health Service of the United States Public Health Service. In 1956, the United States Congress passed the Lumbee Act (HR 4656) which provided federal recognition of the Lumbee tribe, but did not make the tribe's members eligible for federal Indian services.

Low income, low educational level, and unemployment are all associated with a higher rate of health problems. The percentage of American Indian families living below the federal poverty level (\$17,603 annual income for a family of four) in 1999 was 21.0, compared to 8.4 for whites and 22.9 for African Americans. Approximately 19 percent of American Indian families were headed by females, compared to 8 percent for white families. Forty-six percent of the families headed by American Indian females lived in poverty, compared to 29 percent of the families headed by white females. More than two-thirds of American Indian adults (ages 25 and older) had a high school education or less, compared to 47 percent for whites. The unemployment rate for American Indians was 2.2 times that for whites.

On most health records, information about the specific tribe to which an American Indian belongs is not requested or reported. For this reason, and also due to problems in obtaining accurate tribe-specific population data to use as denominators in rates, the data in this report are presented for North Carolina American Indians as a whole. In general, whites and African Americans are used as comparison groups.